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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular. JUNE 1, 1866.

Beethoven's Letters. Translated by LADY WALLACE.
2 Vols. London: Longmans, Green and Co.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

THOSE persons who have read with delight the letters of Mendelssohn, overflowing as they are with the youthful enthusiasm of genius, unfettered by the world's cares; or who have since followed the restless and chequered life of Mozart, as revealed by his correspondence, must not expect to find in Beethoven's letters anything so minutely descriptive of an artist's life; or, indeed, to glean any connected narrative of a man whose genius seemed so to soar above that of his fellow beings, that he lived in a world of his own, and spoke but seldom, even with those whom he held in the highest esteem. There can be little doubt that his deafness, isolating him as it did from society, had the effect of so thoroughly throwing him upon the resources of his art, that he existed but to give utterance to his thoughts in the language he had chosen, and cared little for what the world said in return. That the letters of such a man must be in the highest degree interesting is unquestionable; for it was in these that the mind of the rugged and misanthropic recluse was reflected, as in a mirror; and the bright gleams of intellectual power which light up these communications show us that he might have left us philosophy in books, had he not left us philosophy in music.

Of all men, Beethoven was the least open to be moved by the conventional standard of worth which formed the basis of conduct in the society existing around him. In his letters, as in his music, he wrote what he felt deeply and earnestly; and if, in running through these scattered fragments of a noble mind, his meaning should be occasionally misunderstood or perverted, it must be remembered that his greatest compositions were at first equally misjudged; and that even in the present day, such a profoundly metaphysical creation as his ninth Symphony is looked upon by many as the incoherent raving of a musical fanatic; and most of the works belonging to his "third period," as it is called, are only lately struggling into notice.

In the two volumes of letters now placed before English readers, through the able translation of Lady Wallace, we have not only those edited by Dr. Ludwig Nohl, but also many written to the Archduke Rudolph, from the collection of Dr. Ludwig Ritter von Köchel, many of which are extremely interesting. We are glad to find, by Dr. Nohl's preface, that throughout the collection edited by him, there has been no tampering with the words of the original documents entrusted to him for publication. Beethoven, as we have before said, was the last man we could imagine to figure as a "polite letter-writer;" and the value attached to these communications, therefore, is precisely that which alteration or omission would utterly destroy. As Dr. Nohl truly says, even the "less pleasing aspect of the letters ought not to be in the slightest degree softened (which it has hitherto been, owing to false views of propriety and morality), for it is no moral deformity here displayed. Indeed, even when the irritable master has

recourse to expressions repugnant to our sense of conventionality, and which may well be called harsh and rough, still the wrath that seizes on our hero is a just and righteous wrath; and we disregard it, just as in nature, whose grandeur constantly elevates us above the inevitable stains of an earthly soil."

That the work of collecting these letters has been a labour of love with their enthusiastic editor, there can be little doubt; for in his glowing preface he announces that his task has undermined his health, and cost him "no slight sacrifices." We must forgive him, therefore, for his burst of artistic indignation at the impossibility of obtaining access to the "cabinets of curiosities belonging to various close-fisted English collectors;" although we imagine that, as Beethoven was fond of committing his thoughts rather to his pen than to his tongue, many letters are scattered abroad which would be equally valuable, if only as links in the correspondence already before the world.

The early letters of Beethoven are full of anticipations of future fame in his art, but shadowed by the gloom of an impending fear of consumption, of which both his mother and his brothers died. As early as 1787, in a letter to Dr. Schade, at Augsburg, this subject is mentioned; and this communication, so replete with tender feeling for his mother, whose dying bed he hastened to visit, has an interest which justifies us in extracting it without curtailment.

Bonn, 1787. Autumn.

My most esteemed Friend,—I can easily imagine what you must think of me, and I cannot deny that you have too good grounds for an unfavourable opinion. I shall not, however, attempt to justify myself, until I have explained to you the reasons why my apologies should be accepted. I must tell you that from the time I left Augsburg my cheerfulness, as well as my health, began to decline; the nearer I came to my native city, the more frequent were the letters from my father, urging me to travel with all possible speed, as my mother's health was in a most precarious condition. I therefore hurried forwards as fast as I could, although myself far from well. My longing once more to see my dying mother overcame every obstacle, and assisted me in surmounting the greatest difficulties. I found my mother indeed still alive, but in the most deplorable state; her disease was consumption, and about seven weeks ago, after much pain and suffering, she died [July 17]. She was indeed a kind, loving mother to me, and my best friend. Ah! who was happier than I, when I could still utter the sweet name of mother, and it was heard? But to whom can I now say it? Only to the silent form resembling her, evoked by the power of imagination. I have passed very few pleasant hours since my arrival here, having during the whole time been suffering from asthma, which may, I fear, eventually turn to consumption; to this is added melancholy—almost as great an evil as my malady itself. Imagine yourself in my place, and then I shall hope to receive your forgiveness for my long silence.

You showed me extreme kindness and friendship by lending me three Carolins in Augsburg, but I must entreat your indulgence for a time. My journey cost me a great deal, and I have not the smallest hopes of earning anything here. Fate is not propitious to me in Bonn. Pardon my intruding on you so long with my affairs, but all that I have said was necessary for my own justification. I do entreat you not to deprive me of your valuable friendship; nothing do I wish so much as in any degree to become worthy of your regard. I am, with all esteem, your obedient servant and friend,—L. V. BEETHOVEN, Cologne Court Organist.

The fanciful division of these letters into three parts, the first called "Life's Joys and Sorrows," the second "Life's Mission," and the third "Life's Troubles and Close," seems scarcely applicable to the career of Beethoven, inasmuch as from his earliest years he was impressed with the deep importance of "Life's Mission," and most assuredly his existence was never without its "joys," "sorrows," or "troubles," the latter however, we fear, by far preponderating. An extraordinary fatality indeed seemed to surround the life of this man, who, of all others, should have been left free from the trammels of worldly anxieties. Not only did the guardianship of several members of his family devolve upon him, but he was constantly engaged in communications

with lawyers, and harassed by repeated complaints, which roused his irascible nature into a bold and determined resistance. Upright and straightforward as was his conduct on all occasions, he found it impossible to understand that others should misinterpret his intentions; and thus many of his letters are full of that indignant protest against deceit which led him occasionally into a warmth of expression which he was the first afterwards to regret. Never persistently seeking the good opinion of those around him, he was deeply sensitive of sincere friendship; and fully aware of his ungracious manner, he seemed pained when this infirmity had led him to use any word which might be construed into an affront. His deafness, which commenced in early life, is alluded to in so many of his letters that it may readily be seen how thoroughly it embittered his whole existence. In a letter to Pastor Amenda, he says, "You must know that one of my most precious faculties, that of hearing, is become very defective; even while you were still with me, I felt indications of this, though I said nothing, but it is now much worse. Whether I shall ever be cured remains yet to be seen." Again, in a letter to Dr. Wegeler, he writes, "To give you some idea of my extraordinary deafness, I must tell you that in the theatre I am obliged to lean close up against the orchestra, in order to understand the actors; and when a little way off, I hear none of the high notes of instruments or singers. It is most astonishing that in conversation some people never seem to observe this; being subject to fits of absence, they attribute it to that cause. I often can scarcely hear a person if speaking low; I can distinguish the tones but not the words, and yet I feel it intolerable if any one shouts to me. Heaven alone knows how it is to end!"

That this distressing malady occasionally dragged him down to the depth of despair is apparent from his expressed conviction that he should long ago have committed suicide, had he not lived for art; but the following extract from a letter to Wegeler will prove that he often struggled manfully with his affliction, and asserted his real nature with all the eloquence of conscious power.

What were my thoughts amid the glorious scenery of my fatherland? The hope alone of a happier future, which would have been vain but for this affliction! Oh! I could span the world were I only free from this! I feel that my youth is only now commencing. Have I not always been an infirm creature? For some time past my bodily strength has been increasing, and it is the same with my mental powers. I feel, though I cannot describe it, that I daily approach the object I have in view, in which alone can your Beethoven live. No rest for him! I know of none but in sleep, and I do grudge being obliged to sacrifice more time to it than formerly. Were I only half cured of my malady, then I would come to you; and, as a more perfect and mature man, renew our old friendship. You should then see me as happy as I am ever destined to be here below—not unhappy. No! that I could not endure; I will boldly meet my fate; never shall it succeed in crushing me. Oh! it is so glorious to live one's life a thousand times over! I feel that I am no longer made for a quiet existence.

It was well for Beethoven that he had not the constant necessity of applying to great men for patronage. As early as the year 1800 he owns, in a letter to Wegeler, that his compositions are already "very profitable," and that he has more commissions than he can possibly execute. As two or three of his friends and patrons had united to settle an annuity upon him, he was enabled to pursue his art until some situation offered itself. Had he been actually struggling with poverty at the commencement of his career, his manner would scarcely have raised up friends amongst those in power and prosperity; for his contempt for the idolatry of mere rank displayed itself in very early life, even when his letters to the

Archduke Rudolph were filled with protestations of attachment and respect. "The servility of man towards his fellow man pains me," he says, in a letter to the Countess Guicciardi, "and when I regard myself as a component part of the universe, what am I, what is he who is called the greatest?"

But the following extract, from a letter to Bettina von Arnim, is amusing from its indignant protest against the instinctive worship of rank and title:—

Kings and princes (he says) can indeed create professors and privy-councillors, and confer titles and decorations, but they cannot make great men—spirits that soar above the base turmoil of this world. There their powers fail, and this it is that forces them to respect us. When two persons like Goëthe and myself meet, these grantees cannot fail to perceive what such as we consider great. Yesterday, on our way home, we met the whole Imperial family; we saw them coming some way off, when Goëthe withdrew his arm from mine, in order to stand aside, and say what I would, I could not prevail on him to make another step in advance. I pressed down my hat more firmly on my head, buttoned up my great coat, and, crossing my arms behind me, I made my way through the thickest portion of the crowd. Princes and courtiers formed a lane for me; Archduke Rudolph took off his hat, and the Empress bowed to me first. These great ones of the earth *know me*. To my infinite amusement, I saw the procession de file past Goëthe, who stood aside with his hat off, bowing profoundly.

In the letters concerning his art Beethoven is always earnest—always striving to impress upon others that which he so strongly felt himself, the sacred duty of fulfilling a mission for which the true artist was designed by his Creator. Even in his letters to the Countess Guicciardi, amidst the utmost protestations of affection, feeling for his art seems to creep in, and as if he had been suddenly aroused from his dream of love by a passing thought of his artistic duty. "Love demands all," he says, "and has a right to do so, and thus it is *I feel towards you*, and *you towards me*; but you do not sufficiently remember that I must live both *for you* and *for myself*." Again, in a letter to Bettina von Arnim, the picture he draws of the ideal being conjured up in the imaginations of genius, would frighten any young lady who longs for the conquest of the conventional model lover. "If God vouchsafes to grant me a few more years of life," he writes, "I must then see you once more, my dear, most dear friend, for the voice within, to which I always listen, demands this. Spirits may love one another, and I shall ever woo yours. Your approval is dearer to me than all the world. I told Goëthe my sentiments as to the influence praise has over men like us, and that we desire our equals to listen to us with their understanding. Emotion suits women only; (forgive me!) music ought to strike fire from the soul of a man. Ah! my dear girl, how long have our feelings been identical on all points!!! The sole real good is some bright kindly spirit to sympathise with us, whom we thoroughly comprehend, and from whom we need not hide our thoughts."

But Beethoven, after all, was an erratic lover; and although a pair of bright eyes may have inspired him with thoughts for an immortal work, we question whether another pair would not have been necessary for the next. Had his passion for the Countess Guicciardi not been a hopeless one, we doubt whether even a second Sonata as good as that dreamily beautiful one in C sharp minor, would have been dedicated to her.

Many of the communications with publishers relating to the sale of his compositions have the utmost interest; and it really appears extraordinary, considering the state of his health, how he could complete the many commissions he was called upon to execute. One of the letters of apology which he was compelled occasionally to write, is positively painful, as showing how he was forced to assume a manner

which must have ill assorted with the state of bodily suffering to which he was almost daily and hourly condemned. It is written to Schott, the music publisher in Mayence, and is dated from Baden, whither he had gone in the hope of obtaining some mitigation of his disease :

The Quartett (Op. 127, in E flat major) you shall also certainly receive by the middle of October. Overburdened by work, and suffering from bad health, I really have some claim on the indulgence of others. I am here entirely owing to my health, or rather to the want of it, although I already feel better. Apollo and the Muses do not yet intend me to become the prey of the bony Seytheman, as I have yet much to do for you, and much to bequeath which my spirit dictates, and calls on me to complete before I depart hence for the Elysian fields; for I feel as if I had written scarcely more than a few notes of music. I wish your efforts all possible success in the service of art; it is that and science alone which point the way, and lead us to hope for a higher life. I will write again soon.

It is well known that Beethoven undertook the guardianship of his nephew, Carl, at the death of his brother; and it is much to be feared that the efforts he used to separate him from his disreputable mother, and the bad conduct of the young man himself, contributed materially to hasten his death. The letters relating to this episode in his life will be read with the utmost interest, and will do much to place before the world the noble and unselfish character of a man whose moroseness has been hitherto so prominently dwelt upon as to make many believe that he was an artistic savage. Let any who still preserve that feeling read these few extracts from letters to his nephew :—

Continue to love me, my dear boy; if I ever cause you pain, it is not from a wish to grieve you, but for your eventual benefit. I now conclude, I embrace you cordially. All I wish is that you should be loving, industrious, and upright.

Now farewell, my darling! deserve this name. Retain what money you require; anything you want shall be purchased for you when I come in. I embrace you, and hope you will be my good studious, noble son.

And again, after the positive knowledge of his nephew's misdoings, comes this kind and forgiving letter, with not even one word written in anger or reproach :

My dear Son,—Say no more! only come to my arms; not one harsh word shall you hear. For God's sake do not bring misery on your own head. You shall be received as lovingly as ever. We can discuss in a friendly manner what is to be done and settled as to the future. I pledge my word of honour you shall meet with no reproaches from me, which, indeed, could no longer avail. You need expect only the most affectionate care and assistance from me. Only come! Come to the faithful heart of—

Your father, BEETHOVEN.

Well indeed may this benevolent guardian say that he does not “dread appearing before the Highest of all judges,” for, with a precarious income and failing health, he had for years voluntarily fulfilled the duties of a fond and affectionate father towards a man who returned his kindness by disobedience and contempt.

When Beethoven, in his latter days, was seized with dropsy, which, added to his other ailments, prevented the possibility of any active mental exertion, he applied to the Philharmonic Society of London, through Moscheles and Sir George Smart, to aid him by organising a concert in his behalf. To the credit of the Society (which even had it no other claim upon our gratitude, must live for ever in the memory of all who love art and artists, for this one act) they generously sent a hundred pounds at once to the suffering composer, whose last written words were poured out in gratitude for this expression of English sympathy with his misfortunes. In spite of the conduct of his nephew, Beethoven appointed him his sole heir, and positively refused to take any precautionary measures which might prevent his taking possession of the whole of his property on his decease. The

day after making this will, he lost consciousness, and on the evening of the 26th March, 1827, expired, after a painful struggle; and, as we are informed, amidst a violent storm of thunder and lightning.

The works of a genius so exceptional as Beethoven, speak for themselves, and time only more deeply stamps them upon the sympathies of each succeeding generation; but few who admire his artistic power can resist the temptation to know the man as he lived—as he thought and acted in the conventional routine of every day life; and as no mere biography, however minute, can satisfy this desire so perfectly as a series of letters indited with his own hand, and instinct with the thought and feeling of the moment at which they are written, we cordially welcome these two volumes as a valuable addition to the fast accumulating store of artistic literature.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

THAT Glück's masterpiece, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, should have been produced for the first time on the Italian stage in England on the 8th ult., can only cause surprise to those whose refined appreciation of the highest works in art has rendered them forgetful of the fact that they are in that small minority of enthusiasts of whom little notice can be taken by those who live by appealing to the taste of the public at large. Operas relying upon mere vocal display, or largely depending upon scenic accessories, have so many charms for the general listener that it is easy to perceive how the chaste and truthful music of Glück should be looked upon as a curiosity, and only produced now and then, to the delight of the few and the passive endurance of the many. Such works, however, have little chance of permanently decaying; and their periodical appearance should, at least, teach people to think whether in ignoring the pure and noble creations of such an exceptional genius as Glück, they are not gradually deteriorating the standard of musical taste, and fostering that unreal and spasmodic school of writing which has destroyed the poetical element in the Drama, and substituted a love for sensational effects and maudlin sentiment.

Iphigenia in Tauris is the finest specimen of a style which created a revolution in operatic music, and caused, as is well known, a feud between the lovers of Italian and German music almost unprecedented in artistic annals. *Alceste* and *Orfeo*, both originally produced at Vienna, were merely adapted to the French stage, but *Iphigenia* was Glück's first opera written for the French capital, and in its composition he has concentrated all his artistic power and ripened judgment.

The first performance of this work was one of the most perfect we have yet heard at Her Majesty's Theatre. To Madlle. Titiens we can only accord the most unqualified praise. Not only her singing, but her acting, and her noble and dignified bearing, were so thoroughly in accordance with the spirit of Glück's music, that the classic colouring of the Opera was never for a moment interfered with. Her fine delivery of the many recitatives which form so important a feature in the work showed how earnestly she had studied the meaning of the composer, and raised her still higher in the estimation of all who prefer intellectual vocal declamation to showy and meretricious display. Mr. Santley's *Orestes* was, as might be expected from all this conscientious artist undertakes, an earnest and truthful realization of the part; and Signor Gardoni, as *Pylades*, struggled manfully against the effects of a recent illness which had evidently weakened his voice. Signor Gassier, too, was a very good representative of *Thoas*, although the music does not lie comfortably within his register. The choruses were extremely well sung, if we except the want of an occasional *piano*, so essential, especially to the beautiful hymn for female voices; and the orchestra, under the skillful directorship of Signor Arditì, left nothing to be desired. Whether this Opera prove attractive or not, so thoroughly satisfactory a performance deserves to be placed on record as an artistic fact; and the thanks of all lovers of real art are due to the management for placing so intellectual a work before its subscribers and the public.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

THE appearance of Madame Maria Vilda in the character of *Norma*, has been the event at this establishment during the last month. After the impression left upon those who recollect Grisi in her best day, it is a triumph for a new singer, and almost a complete novice to the stage, to create so extraordinary an effect in a character intimately associated with the favourite *prima donna* who has now, we believe we may say, definitely retired from public life. Madame Vilda has a voice admirably fitted for the interpretation of dramatic music; and she sings with an expression and earnestness which seems innate, rather than the result of deep study. Mr. Gye may fairly congratulate himself upon the acquisition of an artist who is certain to establish herself as a permanent favourite with the critical audience of the Royal Italian Opera. Madame Lemmens-Sherrington has made a most successful appearance as *Adalgisa* to Madame Vilda's *Norma*, and Signor Brignoli does all that can be done for the thankless part of *Pollio*.